

genocide warning: SUDAN

The Committee on Conscience has issued a genocide warning for Sudan, Africa's largest country.



Jaborona camp for displaced persons.
Malcolm Linton/Liaison Agency, New York, N.Y.

An estimated two million people, mostly civilians, have died in Sudan, and four million have been displaced in the past 17 years as the result of civil war. Primary responsibility for this devastation belongs to the Sudanese government, a military regime based in the north. The principal victims include the Dinka and Nuer peoples in southern Sudan and the Nuba of central Sudan.

A genocide warning means organized violence is under way that threatens to become genocide.

OVERVIEW

The Committee's warning is based on the following government actions:

- A **DIVIDE-TO-DESTROY** strategy of pitting ethnic groups against each other, with enormous loss of civilian life
[Anyone who betrays this nation does not deserve the honor of living. President Omar al-Bashir, March 1990]
- Use of **MASS STARVATION** as a weapon of destruction
[Systematic human rights abuses were the direct cause of the famine in Bahr El Ghazal (that) affected ... approximately one million people, a majority of them Dinka. Human Rights Watch, 1999]
- Toleration of the **ENSLAVEMENT** of women and children by government-allied militias
[The taking of slaves ... [has] a pronounced racial aspect, as the victims are exclusively black southerners and members of indigenous tribes of the Nuba Mountains. U.S. State Department, February 2000]
- Incessant **BOMBING** of hospitals, clinics, schools, and other civilian and humanitarian targets
[The bombs landed where they were supposed to land. Dirdieri Ahmed, Sudanese diplomat, February 2000]
- **DISRUPTION AND DESTABILIZATION** of the communities of those who flee the war zones to other parts of Sudan
[The displaced have basically been concentrated in an isolated and barren area, removed from any commercial center offering work possibilities. ... Food security in camps ... is precarious. UN Special Rapporteur on Sudan, May 1999]
- Widespread **PERSECUTION** on account of race, ethnicity, and religion

Taken individually, each of these actions is a disaster for the victims. Taken together, they threaten the physical destruction of entire groups.



FACTS & FIGURES

AREA: 67,500 sq. mi. (2.5 million sq. km.); almost one-third the size of the continental United States

POPULATION: 33,551,000 (1998 est.)

ETHNIC GROUPS: Hundreds of ethnic groups and subgroups, including Sudanese Arab, Dinka, Beja, Nuer, Nuba, Nubian

RELIGIONS: Islam, traditional indigenous beliefs, Christianity

LANGUAGES: Arabic, English, and hundreds of indigenous languages and dialects

BACKGROUND

Sudan's racial, ethnic, and religious diversity make it difficult to characterize in simple terms the conflict, which is sometimes described as pitting the Arabic-speaking, Islamic north against the African south, where Christianity and traditional religions predominate. That description contains some truth but does not entirely capture the complexity of the situation. For example, the Nuba peoples who have suffered so much live in central Sudan, and many of them are Muslims. And one pernicious government strategy—part of its divide-to-destroy efforts—has been to encourage fighting within and among groups in the south, especially the Dinka and Nuer, with devastating effects for civilians. In any event, the primary author of the Sudanese catastrophe over the past decade has been the Khartoum-based government of Omar el-Bashir, an army officer who seized power in a 1989 coup.

DIVIDE TO DESTROY

The Sudanese government uses a divide-to-destroy strategy to pit ethnic groups against each other. Government-sponsored militias torch houses, loot food supplies and other property, and rape and murder with impunity. The government tolerates the taking of slaves, along with other booty, by Arab tribal militias that raid villages in the south and the Nuba Mountains. It also uses religion as a spur to violence, justifying persecution of and attacks against Christians, followers of traditional indigenous religions, and Muslims who reject the government's extreme form of Islam.

STARVATION AS A WEAPON OF DESTRUCTION

The Sudanese government uses starvation as a weapon. It attacks civilian food production and supplies, then obstructs international relief. This strategy has decimated the Nuba people of central Sudan. In 1998, such government policies caused a famine in southern Sudan that endangered millions and killed tens of thousands, mostly Dinka. Although the government and its proxies were the primary agents of



President Omar al-Bashir at Arab tribal militia rally, 1992.
Scott Peterson/Liaison Agency, New York, N.Y.



Training camp for Popular Defense Forces militia, known among diplomats in Khartoum as "atrocities battalions."
Malcolm Linton/Liaison Agency, New York, N.Y.

the famine, the consequences of the government's actions have been worsened by food diversion by the rebel Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and some local chiefs. Flight bans and bombing attacks routinely disrupt relief activities. This disruption puts thousands at risk of starvation.

OIL: NEW MEANS, NEW MOTIVE FOR GENOCIDE

A new factor worsens the threat of genocide: oil. In late 1999, the Sudanese government began earning hundreds of millions of dollars from oil exports, made possible in part by Western oil companies like Talisman Energy. This hard currency gives the government both greater means and greater motive to accelerate its assault on disfavored groups.

Greater means, because the oil revenues finance the purchase of new weapons. As one Sudanese cabinet minister said, "What prevents us from fighting while we possess the oil that supports us in this battle even if it lasts for a century?"

Greater motive, because the government can tap the country's estimated reserves of some eight billion barrels only if it cleanses ethnic groups like the Dinka and Nuer from the land under which the oil lies. The need to secure oil fields has fueled a vicious scorched-earth campaign, laying waste to a broad swath of territory. Amnesty International has documented what it calls "the human price of oil" in Sudan: "a pattern of extrajudicial and indiscriminate killings, torture and rape—committed against people not taking active part in the hostilities."

There is more to come: the government does not yet control the richest oil deposits. According to the *Washington Post*, "the government is bent on ethnic cleansing of territory surrounding other, as yet unexploited, oil fields."

The Committee on Conscience was established to alert the national conscience, influence policymakers, and stimulate worldwide action to confront and work to halt acts of genocide and related crimes against humanity. Join our electronic newsletter at www.committeeonconscience.org.

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